

Stranger Things are Born to Fly by allisonPTXo3

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Summary:

An epilogue to the Stranger Things season 1. We've never seen Elle's back... could she have wings hidden under those old T-shirts? And what if Maximum Ride just happened to be flying near where Elle was running from the School? Find out what happens as the tension builds and two of our favorite characters meet!

Stranger Things are Born to Fly

She is hungry, so hungry. She hasn't eaten since the day before yesterday, and her feet ache from constantly pushing off from the unforgiving pavement, and her face aches from the endless freezing wind in her face, but there is no way she can stop for even one second.

The people in the white lab coats are coming. They've chased after her, hour after hour, with their dogs and their guns, but every bullet they shoot bends around her, and every time one of the dogs get too close they fall back.

They won't kill her, of that she is sure. They will injure her if they have to, and bring her back to the lab. Following that will be the endless needles, the dog cages, and, worst of all, the sensory deprivation chamber. And the tests. There were always the tests. Whether they are supposed to measure how long she can go without eating, or how fast she can run through a maze, they are always long and they always hurt.

And now she is free. Or she will be at least, as soon as she loses the Whitecoats. That is what she calls them. All throughout her life, those white coats were always there. Watching her. Monitoring her. Heck, she couldn't even pee without them knowing.

Even when she was with Mike and the oth- no no no, stop, stop- she can't afford to think about them, even for a second. There will be tears in her eyes if she does, and then she won't be able to see. She acknowledges what happened, and yes, it was tragic, but it's just that- happened. It's in the past, and she can't think about it right now. She can't think about it ever.

She scolds herself internally. She can't afford to even think about *not* thinking about it! She tucks her head and pounds her feet even harder, avoiding the occasional dog lunging ahead and just focusing on deflecting the bullets- or whatever they are.

There were other experiments. Friends, if she can call them that, whom she has left behind. Then again, if given the chance they

would hardly look back, let alone rescue her. There was no plan when she escaped- the lock on her cage was looser than usual, the door was easily broken- it was just a mad sprint throughout the lab, and then freedom. She had had a half hour of rest, at most. Then the chase was on.

And so she runs, because her life depends on it.

“Thanks- for everything. I really appreciate it.” My voice is rusty.

“You’re welcome,” Ella’s mom says, smiling sadly. “We were glad to take care of you. And good luck- with whatever happens.” I nod. They hug me, like a big Max sandwich. I almost add something, but stop when I feel the telltale prickle of tears starting in my eyes. Tears! I *never* cry. Even when I have broken bones. I step back from Ella and Dr. Martinez, the only real, *normal* people that I’ve ever known, and open the kitchen door. I walk outside, then look over my shoulder at them.

I try and give a little half-wave that probably came off as cheesy but whatever, then clumsily unfold my wings. I’ve never really thought about how my and the rest of my flock’s wings look to outsiders, but there’s no going back now. I turn and look back at Ella and her mom. They stare at me with wide curious eyes. I doubt that they’ll judge me.

I run an awkward few steps, then extend my wings towards the sky and flap, hard. My weight lifts off from the ground, and I’m off- an upwards stroke- *ouch* , a downwards stroke, *ouch* , and- well, you get the idea. My muscles aren’t fully healed yet.

I keep flying for a few hours, then get tired and slow down to land. My internal compass tells me that I’m close to where I was supposed to meet Fang and Nudge two days ago, but my wing is throbbing with each stroke and I am exhausted.

I glide down into one of those gorgeous red canyons to land and rest for a few minutes. But first I want to have some fun: I coast inside the

canyon for a few minutes, just letting the sunlight fall onto my feathers and warm wind brush back my hair.

So I'm not expecting it when a little girl knocks me out of the air.

Everything was going fine before she came to the Cliff. Or should she say, everything was *looking hopeful* before she came to the Cliff. She hadn't really been paying attention to where she was going as long as she was getting away from the Bad Men, so when she got the choice between a flat gravelly road that would give the Whitecoats an easy shot at her and a rocky hill where she could easily hide from them she didn't even think. Now she wishes that she had thought twice.

Her brain is on autopilot- boulder, turn, jump over rock, sprint. An endless cycle that keeps her alive. In the back of her mind she is questioning what to do next.

The white hospital gown that she is in flaps against her side with each stride that she takes. She rustles her wings anxiously underneath the fragile cloth. Maybe she could hit one of the Whitecoats with it. The wings would easily break the fabric, but if she opened them now they would just catch the wind and drag her back. It doesn't help that she can't fly with them- never been taught, never will be. No, she'll wait until later to open them. If she gets the chance. Or the time.

She is broken from her thoughts when she reaches the Cliff. It is a steep fall onto an unforgiving rock floor, though it is beautiful. Thousands upon thousands of bright red rocks streaked with orange adorn the surface of the drop. Not a pleasant landing if she were to jump.

She hears a bark from behind her and whirls around to see three or four of the dogs facing her. All of them are snarling.

As soon as one of them lunges towards her with its mouth intending to bite, an invisible force swipes all of them backwards. She turns and runs again, trying to veer back towards the land this time. It doesn't work. There are even more of the Whitecoats, this time with some of

the Erasers, the lab's henchman. Hybrids like her, they can turn into wolves at will.

One of them raises his gun at her. "Come quietly or we'll kill you!" he snarls. She doesn't respond. It's a bluff, otherwise they would already have done it. Instead she spreads her wings as fast and as wide as she can.

Well, there isn't any other option. And after all, she does have wings. "Oh no you don't!" shouts the Eraser, already starting to morph into a hideous wolf with red eyes. "Get her!" Everyone- the dogs and the henchmen- jump towards her.

She lets herself fall backwards over the cliff and down towards an imminent death. Surely anything is better than being thrown back into the School again.

Immediately she drops like a stone, cutting through the air like a knife. Her eyes open wide, and she hears someone screaming. She abruptly realizes that she is hearing herself.

She has just made this assumption when she hits something- hard. The thing in question grunts in surprise.

She tumbles off of the figure and drops the remaining few feet onto the rocky bottom of the canyon, surviving the drop with merely a headache.

She is just getting to her feet when the figure appears in front of her again. "Who are you?" it asks in a loud voice. She is a teenage girl with tangled brown hair and a leather jacket. She also has wings- gorgeous ones, colored brown sprinkled with white and tan that rise behind her threateningly.

Her own happen to be dark brown, with a sheen of beige on the insides. She folds them self-consciously behind her back.

The girl repeats her question, this time in a gentler tone. "Who are you?"

“Who are you?” This girl, this poor little girl, has wings. And a shaved head. And a hospital gown that’s torn in the back from her said wings. All of which point to the School, the horrible nightmare where Fang, Iggy, Nudge, Gazzy, Angel and I grew up. She backs away from me, looking terrified.

“I’m not going to hurt you, don’t worry.” She keeps backing away. I raise my wings a little to remind the girl that I’m on her side, but she keeps backing towards the other canyon wall. I make no move towards her. I know that if I do she’ll think it’s a trick. I know because I would do the same thing.

She turns around and starts running, her bare feet slapping down onto the hard rocks with each step. I sigh. Now I have to follow her. There is no way that I’ll just let her go off to wherever she’s running to, not when I know that she’s like me.

That doesn’t mean that I can’t follow her in style, though. I take a running start before jumping into the air. Immediately my wings catch the wind and I fly up, high enough that I can see the girl, who is still running. I speed up until I’m right next to her. She just keeps her eyes focused ahead, planting one foot in front of the other.

“You can stop running, you know,” I shout. “I just want to help.” She jerks her head violently from side to side, still not talking. Which brings up a valid question: can she talk? She obviously understood me, so she probably just doesn’t want to speak.

I fly in front of her, forcing her to dodge, then give her a gentle push that sends her sprawling onto the canyon floor. It’s not very nice, but then, what has happened to her- or at least what I *think* happened to her- is a whole lot worse. Which is what I’m trying to find out.

I land and walk over to her. She is getting back onto her feet slowly. “I’m from the School, too.” I watch the girl carefully, judging her expression. She has a good poker face. “Except I escaped ten years ago.” Still, she displays nothing. “My name’s Max. What’s your name, anyway?”

For a moment, I think she’s ignoring me. Then she pushes back the sleeve of her hospital gown to reveal a grungy forearm with the

number 11 tattooed onto it. I feel my eyes widen in shock. She's *branded*? That's terrible! The Flock and I were never branded!

Actually, apparently I do have a microchip in my arm. So I guess we were branded, or at least me, just not as visibly. But still, a tattoo—that's bad.

"Eleven, huh? You need an actual name now that you're not at the School. I made one up for myself- 'Maximum Ride'. Until then... hm, maybe Elle. Yeah, that works."

A couple of neurons fire in unison, and I simultaneously remember how hungry I was back in my School days and that I have a baggie of homemade chocolate chip cookies in my backpack. Immediately I take it off my back and start fishing around for them. Elle watches me the whole time. As soon as I find the darn cookies I toss them over to Elle, who starts wolfing them down like she hasn't eaten in a week. Which, come to think of it, she probably hasn't.

Suddenly I hear a cracking from above my head. Elle looks up. She opens her mouth to say something, maybe to warn me, but by then the boulder is already a few yards above me. I don't even have time to react more than to tense up.

For some reason the boulder hasn't hit me yet. I jump up on reflex and take a few steps away. Gradually, I relax my muscles and fearfully look up. What I see confirms that Elle has escaped from the School.

A big ol' hunk of red canyon rock is floating above my head. I look at Elle. Her nose is bleeding, but she looks incredibly focused on the rock.

"Um, thanks," I say. Which pretty much sums it up. Elle lets the boulder fall. She continues to eat her cookies.

By the time Elle has finished all of the cookies I have decided that the one thing that I can do to help this girl is teach her how to fly. It'll help her avoid the Erasers a lot better, and that way I don't have to rescue her again. Plus, she did save my life, though admittedly I did save hers first.

“Do you know how to fly?” I doubt that she does, I mean, she wouldn’t be *falling out of the sky* onto me otherwise, but I feel like I should still ask. Elle blinks and finally meets my eyes. She shakes her head again, regretfully this time.

“Okay, well, do you want to learn?” I shake out my wings as I say this. It kills me that this child- who can’t be much older than Gazzzy- has these beautiful wings but can’t fly with them. She’s created for it. Literally. It’s in our genes. We were born to fly.

Half an hour later Elle can take little 10-foot hops with aid from her wings like Gazzzy does sometimes when he’s excited... and she’s ready to actually take to the air. Her wings are weak from underuse, but you have to start somewhere, and she can at least glide until they strengthen. I fly around the canyon until I find a good cliff that is somewhat climbable, then land and point it out to her. After another 5 minutes of climbing, we’re ready.

I go first- after I dive off the cliff I hover about 10 feet below her so that I can slow her fall if anything goes wrong.

“You can do it!” I call encouragingly. And she can. I watch as she takes a deep breath and tucks her chin to her chest, steeling herself for the fall.

She leans forward, takes a few tentative steps, and jumps. Her brown-and-white-speckled wings trail behind her like a cloak. As soon as gravity takes hold of her, she spreads them and flaps, hard. It brings her up a good 5 feet, so she does it again, and again, and again, and she’s *flying*.

I smile, mind flooded with warm memories of helping the younger kids in the Flock learn how to fly. I ignore the twinging of guilt in my gut. *I’m on my way, Angel. I’m just helping a little girl first.* Elle starts to fly away, glancing back over her shoulder at me- to say goodbye, I guess.

“Wait!” I shout at her back. She slows down. I speed past her, then hover in front of her. “There- there’s more kids with wings. I live with them.” I watch her face intently, trying to read her expression. Elle’s face remains blank. “Would you like to stay with us? We’ll

protect y-” I stop talking mid-sentence when she shakes her head vigorously, looking fearful. What happened to her, I don’t know. Maybe she isn’t just running from the Whitecoats. But I’m not gonna ask. She obviously can’t do any harm to me, she’s too weak and malnourished. Plus... well, let’s just say that there’s a lot of emotional trauma that goes on at the School. I remember the time that I woke up to Iggy’s tortured whimpers the day after they botched an experiment on his eyes... and there was nothing that I or anyone else could do about it. The Whitecoats could change it, of course, but why would they waste money for anything to help with the pain on a test subject? Yeah, that’s right. Iggy wasn’t even under anesthesia. He was conscious the whole time. And they might be doing the same thing to Angel right this moment. I have to save her!

I blink, shaking myself out of my thoughts. Anyway, Elle clearly doesn’t want to join the Flock.

“Okay... well, it was nice meeting you then, I guess.” I say solemnly. Elle nods. Then she raises her wings and shoots away from me. She is now about 15 feet above me.

“Thanks,” she says in a feeble voice that clearly hasn’t been used often. Then she turns and flies away.

Once I can barely see her anymore, I sigh. Well, I’ve kept Angel and the others long enough. I’ve already done my good deed of the day. Onwards!

I turn the other way and fly back towards the place where Fang and Nudge are waiting for me. The sun beats down on my back and wings, and the wind blows my tangled hair into my face. But I’m going, finally.

ANGEL, I’M ON MY WAY AT LAST!

I’m flying! I’m flying! I’m really doing it! I glance down at the wide earth far down below me and note that the canyon that I was in with Max is already barely visible. My wings feel fine and strong, and I am

surrounded by a crisp blue sky. And best of all, I have a full stomach. It feels so good not to be hungry. And I'm *flying!* I smile. My cheeks ache from it; I haven't smiled since- no, not going there. Since a while ago.

I stretch my wings out to their full extent and marvel at how much more I know than yesterday.

Thanks, Max. Now I have a chance of surviving.

Author's Note:

Please kudo/comment! Any thoughts are appreciated!